

The Builder

NUMBER 309.

VOLUME FOR 1849.

SATURDAY, JAN. 6

BEGINNING THE YEAR.

WE ended our last volume with thanks for favours received, and with a claim on the confidence and kind consideration of our readers. We begin the new one with promises of continued endeavours to improve the character of our journal in all its departments, and so to merit increased support on the part of the public.

Our field is a large one, and, well tilled, cannot fail to yield abundant good. We have pressed into the service fresh labourers, shall avail ourselves of all new discoveries and appliances, and, labouring earnestly and continuously ourselves, shall look with confidence to the time of harvest.

The present would seem to be a turning point in the progress of art amongst us. The cry of "forward," uttered at first by timid voices and with the fear of powerful opponents before their eyes, is now heard loudly in more quarters than one, and begins to have echoes. We have been stationary too long, if not going backwards, say they; our arts are a disgrace to us, and the apathy and ignorance in respect of them, which exist even in the upper classes, deplorable and degrading. See what our forefathers did in architecture: look at the beautiful parish churches and noble cathedrals thickly spread over the country. And shall we, far, far advanced before them as we are in knowledge, and in science which is systematized knowledge, with powers and means within our control of which they never dreamt, pronounce ourselves inferior to them, insist on imitation, and forbid even the attempt to advance? Is art never again to have vitality, and shall we not ourselves strike one blow for progress?

To aid this movement will be our province and our pleasure. Precedent should be an aid, not a trammel,—our servant, not our gaoler; nor shall we relax in our efforts to obtain improved and extended education in art, and to obtain for art that better appreciation which, as a mighty teacher, it would have were it so understood.

The improvement of dwellings; sanitary arrangements; construction; decoration; the literature of art and science; architectural jurisprudence; will receive constant attention: nor shall we cease to afford our readers the earliest intelligence on all matters likely to interest them, looking, as heretofore, into all parts of the United Kingdom for information and instruction. Our country friends may make this part of our work very complete by brief communications from their separate localities.

We have in preparation illustrations of various buildings now in progress, and shall be glad to have our attention directed to others.

THE NORTH PORCH OF THE REDCLIFFE CHURCH, AND "NIL DESPERANDUM."

EVERY one has heard of the "Redcliffe" Church at Bristol, St. Mary's; and most of our readers, probably, have seen it. Piety, science, art, literature, and mystery, have jointly and severally put their mark upon this beautiful structure, and made it an object of interest to so many classes of minds, that there are few buildings in this country which have a fame so world-wide.

Founded by one Bristol merchant, completed by another, and re-edified by a third, the Christian (even if careless of material beauty) may view it, beside its holy purpose, as a noble monument of the saintless devotion of men in those times,—of men who thought not of the "nicely calculated loss or more," and considered no expenditure short of the extreme of their power, no personal efforts and sacrifice, sufficient offering in the cause of the Great Good;—a spirit, let us say in passing, not extinct in our days, and often guided by higher considerations, perhaps, than actuated some at the period of which we are speaking.

The antiquary, the architect, the man of taste, find in it an exhibition of skill and inventive power of the highest character, producing, as a result, extraordinary beauty: it is to them also an invaluable autograph—the autograph of a past time, speaking loudly, and not uninstrucively, to the present. Further, there are models for the draughtsman, an involved history to engage the attention of the archaeologist, and a peculiarity in the joining together of the work of different periods at the west end, which increases the difficulty of the disentanglement.

Then, for the poet, the student of our literature, the investigator of mind in all its strange and startling phases, the biographer, the philanthropist, the lover of romance, its connection with the wondrous boy who perished in his pride—the unhappy Chatterton, who, wanting so little, lost so much, an imperishable and pure renown—has made it a shrine demanding a pilgrimage.

Circumstances have thus concurred to increase the interest, as we have already said, attaching to Redcliffe Church, and it would seem that the list is to be lengthened. A mystery in our prosaic days,—in days when everything can be explained to meanest capacities, whether it be the cause of an earthquake, the ruin of a nation, or the advent of bad weather, is a rarity: yet, lo! another mystery arises to throw its attractive mist around St. Mary's: a mist which, by exciting attention and awakening curiosity, makes obvious while it shrouds.

We need not now tell our readers of the miserable and much to be deplored condition of the fabric in question, for we have done so before; or that a certain amount of restoration has been effected at the east end; that there is an energetic restoration committee, the chair-

man of which, Mr. Proctor, has devoted himself hand and mind to the object in view: or that a "Canyng Society" has been established to aid in the good work, with the present (and three times before) mayor of Bristol, Mr. John Kerle Haberfeld, at its head.

On the 22nd of June Mr. Proctor received a letter, signed "Nil Desperandum," following out a suggestion which had been made that the restoration of the church might be effected by inducing individuals to undertake distinct portions, and inquiring if the committee would obtain drawings from their architect for the restoration of the north porch, and estimates from three respectable contractors in Bristol, for the execution of the work, to enable the writer to judge whether or not it would be in his power to provide sufficient funds to carry it out. The letter, pointed out the mode of correspondence to be adopted, made secrecy an express condition of his contribution, stipulated that no effort should be made to discover him (his letters were to be seen by none but the chairman), and enclosed 20*l.* as an evidence of his sincerity. The committee of course gladly fell into his views, and the required tenders were obtained. The amount of the lowest was 2,500*l.*—a large sum when the size of the structure is considered,—indeed, larger than it should have been, resulting probably from the difficulty of estimating rightly the cost of the carving: and when "Nil Desperandum" was informed of it, he at once replied, that it so far exceeded his anticipation that he could not engage to proceed under it. He offered, however, to furnish a certain sum of money, and to make a further contribution in the course of a year, and more afterwards, if the committee would undertake to expend it in the shape of Caen stone and labour, under the direction of their architect.

Almost at the same time the committee found another coadjutor, where perhaps they would scarcely have looked for it. Mr. Richard Rowe, a liberal dissenter, addressed a letter to the chairman, offering,—as an evidence of his belief that the recent changes by which Bristol is made a free port will tend to restore the trade of the city, and at the same time to shew his appreciation of the zeal of the Redcliffe committee, and of the voluntary principle adopted,—to bring in a vessel belonging to him, 100 tons of stone from Caen freight free. Without going further into details, suffice it to say that the money came, a cargo of stone was brought in Caen, and was freighted by Mr. Rowe; an able foreman, with others, well used to Gothic work, was engaged, and, quietly under cover, they are now proceeding vigorously, carving corbels and canopies, and storing them up ready for spring weather, when they will begin to set.

Annexed we give an engraving of the porch restored, as seen from the north-east, and